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## THE EMERGENCE OF THE POLITICAL VOICE OF SYRIA'S CIVIL SOCIETY FROM WITHIN THE NON-VIOLENT MOVEMENTS OF THE SYRIAN UPRISING

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There is a tendency in the mainstream media to frame the situation in Syria as a one dimensional conflict. Assaad al-Achi<sup>1</sup> points out how “war is much more sensational than a nonviolent movement, (...), that is what sells”<sup>2</sup> and as such that is what is overwhelmingly depicted. As a result, with the absence of pivotal elements of the struggle on the ground, the complexity of the situation is obscured. In many ways, this dominant narrative leads us to what Yassin Al Haj Saleh highlights as an ‘unknowing’ of Syria and its people by “the West and the world at large” which makes “the population invisible, indeed non-existent.”<sup>3</sup> Everything that is Syrian, in essence, is absent. Its inner dimensions, its people, are passed over in silence. For Al Haj Saleh,

the conditions of life, education, health, culture, art, structures of rule, distribution of wealth, stories of men and women, their lives, faces and names. And issues of justice, freedom, human dignity, and the rule of law also remain outside of this narrative. (...) A change of approach is necessary in order for us to become visible, for us to exist.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed this unknowing of Syria is by no means a new phenomenon and it has not only been the West who are guilty of it. The Syrian government has itself remained unknowing of its people, their needs passed over in silence and their freedoms and dignity absent for decades. It was in an attempt to have their voices heard and needs met that the peaceful protests began in early 2011. At the start of the uprising there was a much wider support base both domestically and internationally, with audiences sympathetic to their struggle. This changed with the subversion of the situation from peaceful calls for reform to a violent conflict between multiple sides. Once again, the Syrian people's voices were sidelined. So in response to this and to Al Haj Saleh's demand for a change of approach, this paper is attempting to provide both context to and an arena for the voices of the Syrian people who are fighting within the non-violent movements, whom have been playing a significant role since the start of the peaceful uprising, demanding their narrative be heard. The work of these non-violent movements will be the focus of this paper whom it will argue are building the foundations for a dynamic, and autonomous civil society – *this time with a political voice* – that is indigenous to the Syrian people, their needs and expectations.

In an attempt to show this advancement of civil society, section 2 will explore the changing nature of Syria's civil society in light of the activities of those within Syria's active and diverse non-violent movements. For comparative purposes it is first necessary to outline the state of Syria's civil society pre uprising, under Bashar Al Assad's rule. Section 3 will attempt to show, through an analytical discussion, how Syria's non-violent movements can be seen to be developing a space of civil society, citizenship and freedom. However before we can even begin to do this it is necessary to outline a conceptual

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framework in section 1, relating in particular to the conceptual understanding of civil society, its relationship to democracy and to non-violent movements. While the debate on civil society will emerge at various points throughout this paper, it is not its main aim to provide a thorough investigation into the existing debate, which has been done effectively elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Instead this paper aims to focus its attention on the case of Syrian civil society, with reference to the debate more generally where relevant to the paper and its main objectives. At the same time, this paper does intend to expand the existing debate, to include resistance as a central theme, taking it beyond some of its current boundaries and limitations.

### *Conceptual Framework*

There is little consensus amongst scholars as to an all-encompassing definition of civil society or what it entails, i.e. non-government organisations, social movements, cultural institutions, etc. Although there are certain characteristics that emerge from the discourse, in regards to its 'external borders' and to its 'inner space'.<sup>6</sup> The external borders being predominantly that *which it is not* and the inner space referring to its internal characteristics. The external borders of civil society are commonly perceived to be "outside of the State and marketplace"<sup>7</sup> and "the opposite of family"<sup>8</sup> with groups that "crosscut ties of kinship and patronage"<sup>9</sup>. In this way, civil society today is commonly seen to be a separate sphere of society, which should remain autonomous from other spheres of society that may attempt to control or undermine it. In order to be able to ensure this autonomy it must also have the power to resist, influence and change that which it deems necessary for collective purposes, in the common interest of society.<sup>10</sup> For Suzanne Rudolph this power is likely to come from civil society's "interaction with rather than subordination to the state."<sup>11</sup> It is here then, that the discourse on civil society and democracy begins to emerge since for the two spheres to interact the relationship would likely have to be built on the foundations of democracy and not on a system that would subordinate and restrict civil society.

### *Civil Society and Democracy*

In many respects civil society has become synonymous in our contemporary world with the idea of a strong working democracy,<sup>12</sup> being one of the foundational 'building blocks' of democracy that is generally conceptualised as the social space in which a democratic polity is enacted. According to John Keane the positive connotations attached to civil society signify "the emerging consensus that civil society is a realm of freedom [which] correctly highlights its basic value as a condition of democracy; where there is no civil society there cannot be citizens with capacities to choose their identities, entitlements and duties within a political-legal framework."<sup>13</sup> Taking it even further Michael Walzer states that "only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society, only a democratic civil society can sustain a democratic state".<sup>14</sup>

There are three potential assumptions here. Firstly that civil society is itself democratic. Secondly, that without civil society there can be no free citizen. Thirdly, that civil society must (and can potentially only) exist within a democratic state. The first assumption would likely be dependent both on our conceptions of civil society and democracy and on the context of the situation of which we are researching. As such as Zinecker stipulates, civil society "can contain democratic as well as non-democratic, civilised as well as non-civilised segments, where either segment may outweigh the other, and depending on the balance, may configure civil society as a

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whole as being democratic, non-democratic, civilised or non-civilised. Democratic civil societies are civilised, but civilised civil societies are not necessarily democratic.”<sup>15</sup>

Secondly and perhaps most importantly is the question of the relationship between civil society and the free citizen. There is no easy answer to this question and as such it will be tackled all the way through this paper. As will become clear throughout the discussion on Syria, the freedom of the citizen is directly related to the restrictions placed upon and repression of civil society by the government and/or governing bodies. The final question is particularly pertinent if we are discussing civil society in terms of non-democratic countries. If a democratic state is a stipulation for the existence of civil society, how can we even begin to consider the existence of civil society in developing countries and possibly in some developed countries too?<sup>16</sup> If we are to take Walzer's statement as accurate in its entirety, then we are essentially crippled in pursuing the main aim of this paper right from the start. Instead this paper prefers to begin from Zinecker's assertion that civil society can “become a democratic actor... this can result in non-democracies transforming into democracies under the pressure of such temporary democratic civil societies”<sup>17</sup>. Leading us to begin contemplating Mohammed Al-Jabiri question “is it possible to establish a civil society in a non-democratic form?”<sup>18</sup> This is a subsequent question that this work seeks to continue answering throughout the paper.

It is important to note that the association of democracy with civil society has not always been the case. Civil society has had an uncertain emergence into, and ambiguous meanings within Western discourse. Over the course of the usage of the term Browers highlights that it has “been associated with differing sets of principles and practices by thinkers working in different political and ideological contexts”<sup>19</sup> both within Western and non-Western discourse and it continues to be under much debate today.<sup>20</sup> These differing sets of principles are evident amongst the variations in meaning since its introduction into discourse amongst the early Greek philosophers and then again by the European Enlightenment thinkers which influenced nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers including Hegel and Gramsci. We can also see a divergence in meaning amongst Japanese Marxists in the 1960s, in Latin American in the 1970s, Eastern European thinkers in the 1980s and the re-introduction of the concept into mainstream Western discourse in the 1990s.<sup>21</sup> Since this period in Western discourse the ‘good governance’ agenda became common practice amongst development policy makers to use the concept of civil society as a means of promoting democratic institutions to countries where civil society “appears weak or non-existent.”<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly if we look at the two overarching approaches to the current conceptualisation of civil society we can see a division between Western European/American liberal democratic tradition and the ‘rest of the world’. For the former “it is perceived as strengthening the existing democratic system, acting as a watchdog against intrusions of the state into the realm of the private and the public”<sup>23</sup> and for the majority of the rest “civil society is seen as a system changing force”,<sup>24</sup> whether against external forces or internal regimes. This division highlights a distinction in the role of civil society which may also point towards the type of state in which a civil society exists – although of course this is not always going to be the case. The key here is that civil society's role is forced to be one of resistance when the state in which it exists is no longer playing its role in being ‘of the people, by the people, for the people.’<sup>25</sup> This leads us into the discussion of the conceptualisation of civil society as resistance, largely emerging from Gramsci's thought. It also brings us back to the key theme in civil society discourse on

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the autonomy of civil society from the state, which is particularly important for civil society to be capable of fighting on the 'battlefield'<sup>26</sup> against the state when necessary.

### *Conceptualising Civil Society as Resistance*

While Gramsci<sup>27</sup> saw civil society as being in essence an *aspect* of the state he also saw the importance of striving for autonomy from the state. This autonomy would be achieved via the establishment of certain institutions through which society was able to maintain representation and organisation of itself. Such institutions for Gramsci included educational, cultural, professional and even religious institutions. It would be when the state began to repress civil society and restrict its autonomy that resistance was necessary from within this realm. Consequently Gramsci's theory of political change was built largely on his notion of civil society which was vital in its role in challenging state power, particularly when dealing with a strong state.

John Locke in his *Second Treatise of Civil Government* describes the arousal of such a reaction of resistance and rebellion by civil society in its resistance to a tyrannical system as an opposition, "not to persons, but authority."<sup>28</sup> It is when the authority or government ceases to be *just or civil* and is no longer able to sufficiently meet the needs and aspirations of its people, when it no longer fulfils its function, it is the role of civil society to "protect the property and liberty"<sup>29</sup> of its members by working towards dissolving that government through rebellion. This is a worthy task even if it means the short term effects of such a rebellion are likely to create a more difficult, anarchical state of being. This task has been undertaken in the hope that it will eventually lead to a more desirable state in the future, one that both individual and society are able to agree and accept, with the establishment of a social contract, as to how things *ought* to be.

According to Gramsci civil society would itself also need to go through its own transformation in order to reach a point where it could act as a counter hegemonic power, since over time civil society itself could fall into the trap of sustaining the hegemonic power. For Gramsci, this process of transformation must take place on a cultural and political level, a rethinking of itself by its own organic intellectuals. Once civil society had begun its transformation into its role as resistance, it would be at this point where activism would become prominent and primary to the role of civil society in its fight against an authoritarian state that attempts to control every aspect of its existence. It is at this juncture that the actions and aims of civil society diverge between the traditional or primordial conception of civil society of maintaining or sustaining representation and justice to one that is involved in direct practical activism and rebellion arising out of necessity, as instruments of resistance and struggle against oppression, in an attempt to demand its right to exist. Acting predominantly within, as Gramsci suggests, the cultural and political level.

This transition in the role of civil society can take many forms, depending on need and situation, from non-violent means including the use of persuasion through the avenue of the arts and new media, symbolic public acts, declarations and petitions, the production of leaflets and pamphlets, the arrangements of mass protests, assemblies and strikes, social, economic and political non co-operation, unruly behaviour or civil disobedience, to a full blown armed and violent resistance. While there certainly exists an abundance of violent resistance within the Syrian situation, it is the activities of Syria's non-violent resistance that will be explored as we go on.

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### *Civil Society as Resistance: Non-Violent Resistance within Non-Violent Movements*

Before we move on to the case study on Syrian civil society and the non-violent resistance within it, post uprising, it would be useful to outline precisely what we mean by the notions of non-violent movements and non-violent resistance. Non-violent resistance (NVR) or civil resistance (which is often used in reference to the unarmed, non-military character of non-violent movements) are commonly seen as a strategy adopted to achieve political and social change that involves using active “non-violent methods...civilian led action” which “is increasingly frequent as a method by which ordinary people seek to change circumstances they find intolerable.”<sup>30</sup> Furthermore it can often be seen to be a means of expressing grievances that are held widely amongst the general population.<sup>31</sup> According to Véronique Dudouet it is an effective tool amongst “marginalised communities” in their attempt to “redress structural imbalance and claim rights to justice or self-determination”<sup>32</sup> It is also important to note that such resistance can be opposed to both physical violence and structural violence.

The relationship between civil society and non-violent movements becomes evident if we explore both in terms of their role in resistance to “oppression, domination and any other forms of injustice”<sup>33</sup>. In a similar fashion to the conceptualisation of civil society as resistance of which Locke speaks, the non-violent ‘theory of consent’ holds that a ruler can only remain in power as long as its subjects voluntarily obey, and as such when a ruler no longer operates justly “the essence of NVR rests on withdrawing this consent through non-cooperation or civil disobedience towards unjust laws, so that governments can no longer operate.”<sup>34</sup> This role remains in the hands of the citizen, linking NVR and civil society even further. It becomes possible then to say that the activities of the non-violent movements occur, more often than not, within the sphere of civil society – particularly if we conceptualise civil society as resistance.

It is within civil society’s role as resistance, which is often carried out by non-violent movements, that one of civil society’s inner spaces is vital - that of its *political voice*. While there have been attempts by some scholars to separate civil society from politics their relationship is undeniable - civil society is a political project.<sup>35</sup> Without a relationship to politics civil society would have no place in protecting and defending the liberty of society. In order for civil society to be able to fulfil its role it requires a political voice – which represents the voice of the active citizen. As Zinecker points out “political liberties – freedom of speech and association – materialise only in civil society.”<sup>36</sup> In this way, it is the political voice of civil society that expresses its discontent for that which is intolerable and it is precisely this political voice that Syrian civil society was denied, as we will begin to see in the following section.

### *The Case of Syrian Civil Society: Syrian Civil Society Pre-Uprising, Post-Bashar (2000-2011)*

Syrian civil society prior to the uprising in early 2011 was largely subdued, having to act within the constraints of a regime that restricted their voices and activities. The regime attempted to control nearly every aspect of civil society’s existence through its adoption of a very limited conception of civil society. Many, if not all of the arenas that would fall under the realm of civil society were controlled by the State. This included the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of people’s lives, including, in the case of the Syrian state, also religion which has the potential to act within all four arenas. Unlike civil society in the ideal, which would have the role of safeguarding and defending society, Syrian civil society had no real control over these realms. The problem within contemporary Syria therefore was

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not a lack of understanding of the concept of civil society, but rather a lack of power over or within it. In this case, rather than in the ideal of civil society as being distinct from the state while at the same time interacting with and potentially influencing it, Syrian civil society under Ba'athis rule, was overwhelmingly controlled and directed by the state.

It is precisely this absence of power and control within civil society that is of interest to this paper. In essence, it is the lack of a *political voice* within civil society that was most damaging to this realm. While there were certain elements of Syrian civil society that had some degree of presence and even autonomy, the existence of a political voice was limited in every respect and in every realm.<sup>37</sup> The power to influence, change or control the practices or activities within these realms was *ultimately* in the hands of the government. A populist corporatist form of associational life did begin to emerge and gain power and authority in Syrian society. In addition, there was also the existence of a more primordial civil society, groups one would be part of from virtue of birth and not choice per se – such as kinship, the tribe or religious affiliation. There was also a significant association of religious charities, both Islamic and Christian, that had a prominent role in society. However, all were required to undertake their activities under the conditions handed to them by the regime. This was done in large part to benefit the government by outsourcing certain areas of its work, particularly in areas falling within the remit of work undertaken by charity organisations that supported the poor, elderly, disabled, the young and women. Of course, these areas were carefully chosen, particularly with regards to their potential to challenge the regime or benefit it. In light of this, whilst this paper acknowledges the fact that certain areas<sup>38</sup> of civil society, within certain conceptualisations, did exist within Syria, for the purpose of this paper this line of discourse will be put aside and focus placed on the lack of a *political voice* of Syrian civil society, its impact and finally the relationship between the uprising and the emergence of a political voice.

### *The Political Voice of Syria's Civil Society*

If we are to take civil society as the space in which democratic polity is enacted then the lack of a political voice within this arena can clearly be seen through Yassin Al Haj Saleh's description of Syrian public life, where he suggests that there was, "no space for internal political life, no space for public conversation or for any type of independent political organisation. Indeed, it was impossible for groups of Syrians to gather even in private homes to discuss public matters. The Syrian people lived in absolute political poverty, forbidden for more than forty years the right to assembly and the right to speech."<sup>39</sup>

This description indicates a society that was largely depoliticised, living within, as Robin Yassin-Kassab described, a 'kingdom of silence'.<sup>40</sup> While under Hafez Al Assad's presidency any undertakings of civil society's political activities were overwhelmingly suppressed, the coming to power of his son Bashar in 2000 saw the potentiality for change. While no one was under any false estimations that there would cease to be a commitment to the policies of the 'Immortal Leader', many saw the new president as a promise towards much needed economic and political liberalisation and modernization. Accountability, transparency, development and reform were key words throughout his addresses, particularly when it came to the realms of education and culture. Assad stated, "our educational, cultural and media institutions must be reformed and modernised in a manner that... renounces the mentality of introversion and negativity".<sup>41</sup> Although some were sceptical of any real change occurring, many remained hopeful.

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It was during the early phase of Bashar's presidency that the Damascus Spring became visible with the emergence of the phenomena of the 'salons', the civil society meetings and discussion groups which spread predominantly across Damascus.<sup>42</sup> The interests of these meetings revolved around issues of civil society and political reforms and consisted largely of a certain strata of Syrian society, its writers, poets and intellectuals.<sup>43</sup> While these were the people who organised and initially attended the meetings the events grew in popularity and gained attendees from varied sections of Syrian society. Alan George stipulates that it was the aim of these associations to "revive the institutions of civil society and achieve balance between their role and that of the state in the context of a real partnership between them in the higher national interest."<sup>44</sup> This led to numerous high profile attempts to press the government for reform, including the Statement of the 99, and the subsequent Statement of the 1,000 and the Damascus Declaration much later in 2005.<sup>45</sup> At no point did these initiatives call for an outright change of regime but were interested in working with the government to bring about reform *over time*. While initially these gatherings were tolerated, the government soon changed its position and arrests and detainment followed. According to Robert Rabil this was sending a "clear message to the public that it would not tolerate any reform it could not control".<sup>46</sup> Any attempts that were made to push for an independent civil society were interpreted as a threat to the stability and security of the state and as such were suppressed. It became obvious that the hard line of Hafez Al Assad would be upheld by his son (and the 'old guard').

As a result, the majority of activities occurred in secret, between close knit circles, that were deemed trustworthy. This forced many to cease their attendance, further dividing and alienating different sectors of society. Furthermore, the logistical limitations placed upon such groups and gatherings created even more problems, where according to research by Wael Sawah, "activists have been unable to meet and discuss party policy, which has remained in the hands of small circles of leaders, and have been without the means to engage in healthy political life inside the party or in society, which [has] affect[ed] the performance of the civil society itself."<sup>47</sup> This strategy worked to cripple the movements' success and its ultimate aim. As Michel Kilo highlights, the aim of the movement to revive civil society was based on an attempt to bring the people of Syria into the fold, in order for the movement to cease to be an elitist group that was not in touch with Syrian reality. He states, "either we could work as an elite and found a new political party. Or we could work in a different way, offering knowledge, ideas, experiences, reflections and emotions [to that part of society] which is now outside of politics: to help society restore itself politically through a cultural project that we offered."<sup>48</sup>

Whilst at the start this strategy proved successful with the inability of the movements to sustain themselves and act freely enough to enable them to encompass and represent the majority of the Syrian population these weaknesses were only amplified. According to Kamal Al Labwani<sup>49</sup> this was because they remained on a level that was too symbolic. They were unable to penetrate mainstream society, and without the support of or mobilization of the masses, these movements would remain powerless to achieve the change for which they strove.<sup>50</sup>

### *The Syrian Government's Civil Society*

While the government was suppressing the intellectual and civil society movements in the years following the Damascus Spring, it also pursued its own agenda, attempting to create its own narrative and conception of civil society. It sought to bring the debate on civil society to the foreground of

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mainstream discourse within Syria, particularly following the establishment of the Syria Trust for Development in 2007.<sup>51</sup> The issue of civil society was put on the agendas of both the 10<sup>th</sup> (2006-2010) and 11<sup>th</sup> (2011-2015) Five Year Plans, which were interested in creating workshops and initiatives to further investigate and develop civil society in the advancement of Syria as a nation.

### *GONGOs & a Business-Centred Civil Society*

These initiatives included such things as entrepreneurship for the younger population, the development of locally based and EU-Syrian partnership projects that would support the advancement of rural districts, rights of women, higher education standards, and the promotion of culture as a means of increasing the role of civil society. One of the most significant initiatives was the introduction of laws granting a modern legal framework to civil society and its non-governmental organisations.<sup>52</sup> The problem with this, however, was the government's control over which organisations may or may not be considered an NGO and furthermore how much power the government had over the activities of the NGOs (as such Government Organised Non-Government Organisations, GONGOs).

The focus of the various NGOs work pointed towards a very limited and carefully constructed conception of civil society. This conception was based on the (controlled and permitted) activities of NGOs and one which largely remained in the realm of economics, providing more freedom and flexibility exclusively to business and enterprise. While certain initiatives addressed some important issues, including women's rights and poverty, a great deal of work undertaken was never put into practice. For example, the work undertaken by NGOs on women's rights, who were fighting for "the right of a Syrian woman to pass their nationality to their children" and for laws against "certain social issues including laws against honour killings and marital rape" never came to fruition, "despite certain cosmetic changes to the constitution that occurred."<sup>53</sup> As a result, this did little for social freedom and nothing for political freedom which were overwhelmingly neglected.

For Joshua Landis, these initial efforts could have been viewed as a gesture of a government that wanted to "open up more space for civil society to grow, breathe and develop."<sup>54</sup> However, as many academics have brought to light including Mary Kaldor<sup>55</sup> and Yahya al- Aous,<sup>56</sup> the simplistic association of civil society with NGOs only works to limit the activities of civil society within the confines of what the state deems acceptable and legal and permits the state to act to restrict those who may choose to act outside of those confines. Furthermore, as Hinnebusch highlighted, the dominance of economics in Syrian civil society would result in the construction of "a business-centred civil society"<sup>57</sup> by a growing new bourgeoisie which would lead to demands for a greater rule of law and a limiting of state power. While this business centred civil society was developing and gaining elements of power within Syria, the interests of the business elite rarely converged with the interests of the intellectuals within the civil society movements<sup>58</sup> and certainly did not with average Syrians.<sup>59</sup>

It is precisely here, with the lack of representation of those within society, where Syrian civil society was unable to act in its ideal. The increased interest in civil society by the Syrian government failed to put its attention on one vital element - of giving autonomy to this realm. The one dimensional conception of civil society that the regime espoused, which attempted to *appear* to represent the needs of the people, was insufficient in meeting the demands of an indigenous and representative civil society that would have the ability to call for real social and political reform. Indeed as the Syrian thinker Burhan Ghalyun put it years earlier, the likelihood of the Syrian state to ever meet the needs of a free civil society was minimal given that, "the socially alienated state fears its own society and views every move or whisper coming from civil society as political opposition, a rejection of the state authority and a direct threat



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to the existence of the community, the nation and the revolution. As a result, the state has turned inward, toward its own coercive forces, which are developed at great expense, not to provide for the needs of society, but to better crush it.”<sup>60</sup>

### *Syria's Civil Society Post-Uprising*

It would be overly simplistic to assume that the lack of autonomy and freedom granted to Syrian civil society was the cause of the uprising in 2011. It would also be erroneous to assume that it played no role either. A combination of social, economic and political factors contributed to the emergence of the uprising, which have been explored extensively by a number of authors.<sup>61</sup> However it was the lack of a political voice within civil society over an extended period of time that prevented people from having their needs heard and therefore met. In this way, it was the government's inability to meet the needs of the people and the government's determination to suppress people's expressions, viewed all too often as opposition as Ghalyun pointed out, that led to the initial uprising with the emergence of the peaceful protests and also to the suppression of them.

### *Syria's Active Non-Violent Movements*

In a similar fashion to the demands of the movements of the Damascus Spring, the initial protests were not calling for outright regime change. Instead, as outlined by Hassan Abbas, they sought economic, social and political reform, with a desire to work with the government towards the establishment of “a new social contract”.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, with the increase in violence perpetrated by the government against the peaceful protestors, armed resistance inevitably emerged. This was followed by the development of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) which lacked real organisation and an established central command. This made it easier for foreign extremist groups to enter Syria and hijack the uprising. Regrettably, it is here that the dominant narrative of the mainstream media and of academic and political discourse has remained. The work undertaken by those in the non-violent movements (NVM) are rarely a significant feature.<sup>63</sup> Despite the fact that the NVMs are the muted story that was not allowed to move beyond demonstrations into a fully engaged civil resistance, their work has persisted in the face of hostility, kidnappings, detainment and death perpetuated by both the regime and extremist groups active on the ground.

These NVMs are by no means homogeneous. There are hundreds of groups that emerged across Syria that vary in their activities and their means of organisation. Activist Omar Aseel and members of the Syrian Nonviolence Movement have created a comprehensive mapping of these groups, the numbers and nature of which have changed significantly over the duration of the situation.<sup>64</sup> Another recent study, *Activism in Difficult Times: Civil Society Groups in Syria 2011-2014* examines a multitude of these groups across various areas of Syria and explores their varying identities, activities and struggles.<sup>65</sup> Their differences in ideology, activity, organisation, interaction with external forces, etc. are dependent on numerous factors including their location, the presence of extremist groups, their ability to cross borders and their access to funds. There is also significant diversity among the members of these groups, Syrian citizens who come from all classes, sects and religions, many of whom had no previous experience of activism. Although, as Al Achi puts forward, “in the past, most Syrians shunned civil society initiatives because these were the very activities stopped by the Ba'ath Party. The revolution forced Syrians to reconnect with each other and to begin working together effectively”.<sup>66</sup>

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### *Activities of the Non-Violent Movements*

While a great deal of these groups came together to provide humanitarian relief to the besieged areas, their roles have developed far beyond this. The establishment of civilian led Local Co-ordination Committees (LCC) and Local Councils in many of the non-government controlled areas were, according to Al Achi, “among the earliest political networks to form cells across Syria. Their template for collective action helped spread the tactic of nonviolent civil disobedience during the first year of the uprising.”<sup>67</sup> According to Rana Khalaf et. al. some of the tactics they adopted included organising demonstrations, managing public relations, developing strategies and building up networks of contacts and engaging in fundraising.<sup>68</sup> In addition to these forms of undertakings some of the key areas of their work can be seen to fall into several categories.

### *Media*

With the development of media centres across Syria, the LCC became key in the dissemination of information both within Syria between different groups, towns and cities and internationally. Furthermore, the emergence of the citizen-journalist, following the expelling of foreign correspondents and news agencies from the country, enabled an unrivalled access to and dissemination of photographic images and video footage of the events taking place on the ground. In addition, Omar Al Assad sees the establishment of informal news agencies breaking the “long history of censorship and disinformation” and “opened a hole in the wall of media restrictions behind which Syrian society lived”.<sup>69</sup> This media freedom led to the development of a number of opposition media outlets, including numerous newspapers and radio stations, predominantly functioning online. Such examples include Radio SouriaLi established in October 2012 “in an attempt to bypass censorship and reach out to the largest number of Syrians, both within and outside the country, despite their limited resources”<sup>70</sup> and the publication of a local newspaper in January 2012, *The Grapes of my Country*,<sup>71</sup> by a women’s group in Darayya, Damascus, who work towards promoting “the principles of the civil state and civil society”.<sup>72</sup>

The dominance of new media and the online nature of a great deal of the communication within the uprising has been in part a result of a number of issues including, the restriction of access to and from Syria; an effect of the younger generation of the *now* activist; and also in its reliability in the dissemination of information, film, documentaries and other various forms of artistic creative expression. Most importantly, it would appear that the use of new media and new technologies, in the virtual realm enabled such NVMs to continue to work, as one research paper stipulates, “clandestinely, even in areas under control of extremist armed groups”<sup>73</sup> in order to ensure their interaction could continue “with the Syrian diaspora and the international community”<sup>74</sup>. In many ways, even when the regime attempted to put restrictions on their ability to communicate, with the cutting off of mobile phones and the internet, they were still able to communicate more freely than they ever had been before the uprising began<sup>75</sup>.

### *Art & Culture*<sup>76</sup>

Not everything has remained in the virtual realm. Graffiti, from which the uprising began,<sup>77</sup> has become, “despite extreme danger, little by little, wall by wall” one of the most “powerful forms of resistance”.<sup>78</sup> An example of the use of graffiti is the works of the *Lovers’ Notebooks* on the walls of Saraqeb, Idlib. Upon the liberation of the city from regime forces in late 2012 many began to “celebrate

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their new-found freedom by painting the walls of their city”<sup>79</sup> depicting the experiences of their lives and using quotes from famous Arab poets. However with the increased presence and dominance of extremist groups, many of the works were painted over and the activists’ ability to continue their work was made impossible, with many having to flee the country. Some of them do however continue their work in exile, recently releasing a film on the subject of the *Lovers’ Notebooks*.

The creative and artistic expression of those within the NVMs extends beyond graffiti and has involved the production of art in its numerous forms, including film, music, comedy, comics, cartoons, poetry and literature. For instance, the publication and distribution of pamphlets and underground intellectual literature, the making and production of posters and magazines and organising symbolic public acts. One of the most internationally visible acts of expression are the satirical banners, often in English, from the town of Kafranbel. The messages on the banners not only reflect the struggle of the people of Kafranbel and the rest of Syria but also highlight the hypocrisies of the international community, feature international current events and use international cultural symbols and icons in an attempt to universalise and humanise their struggle. Another example is the Damascus street campaign s carried out by *Save the Rest*, which attempts to highlight the plight of the prisoners of conscience held by the Syrian regime. They distribute pamphlets across the city which are disguised as folded 500 Syrian pound notes with information about the suffering; some with messages from the prisoners themselves.<sup>80</sup>

### *Rebuilding of Institutions*<sup>81</sup>

A large proportion of the work undertaken by the NVM is concerned with rebuilding the economic, legal, civic, social, cultural and moral foundations for a functioning civil society with a political voice. Part of this process is about developing strategies for rebuilding democratic communities by liberating minds, encouraging intellectual and creative thought and action, promoting reconciliation and attempting to counter pressure from extremist groups. Many of these NVM groups have also, highlights Khalaf et.al., “contributed to containing the process of fragmentation along ethnic, sectarian, political and ideological lines, and continue to do so today despite the prevailing climate of violence”.<sup>82</sup> They also found that these groups introduced various public services including the distribution of aid, medical services and education, maintenance of the judiciary system and management of waste collection in areas that had previously been under regime control.<sup>83</sup> Courts and security services were set up in many areas<sup>84</sup> and trade unions and students groups were also established to counter the decades long restrictions of these groups under the Ba’athist umbrella. Other forms of organisation were also developed including such things as youth networks, development and rights based organisations.<sup>85</sup>

The conduction of educational workshops has also been a priority for the NVMs, including running workshops on media and communication skills, humanitarian and medical assistance, legal awareness and many others. For example, the organisation ‘Building the Syrian State’ runs leadership and democracy building workshops<sup>86</sup> with the aim of arming the people with the ability to rebuild the country and not leave it in the hands of the government or foreign forces. Interestingly, some of the most popular workshops were based on Gene Sharp’s<sup>87</sup> teachings for civil disobedience and resistance.<sup>88</sup>

Inevitably, the need for legal assistance has also emerged and as a result an organisation which began as a Facebook group soon developed into the Free Syrian Lawyers Association. According to the group who work between Turkey and Syria, they attempt to, not only represent the Syrian people in need of legal assistance, but also to “hold the revolution to higher standards” by supervising “FSA interrogations

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of captured army soldiers, monitor rebel 'courts' and provide representation to defendants accused of supporting the government."<sup>89</sup> According to one of the founding members of the organisation, "the ultimate aim is to set up temporary criminal courts in all liberated areas."<sup>90</sup> In addition, there is the Syrian Civil Defence, known as the White Helmets, a group of "2,221 volunteer search and rescues workers from local communities who risk their lives<sup>91</sup> to save others"<sup>92</sup> following attacks and bombings. According to their website, they "save people on all sides of the conflict... deliver public services to nearly 7 million people, including reconnecting electrical cables, providing safety information to children and securing buildings".<sup>93</sup> They also state that they are "the largest civil society organisation operating in areas outside of government control" which pledges "commitment to the principles of 'Humanity, Solidarity, Impartiality'".<sup>94</sup>

### *The Imagery and Image of the Non-Violent Movements*

As touched upon previously, many of the activities of these groups were an attempt to remind people of the original aims and values of the uprising. A spokesperson from *Kartoneh*, the anonymous collective of artists and activists who produce banners in Deir Al Zour, highlights this sentiment regardless of the struggles they have faced "we did not carry weapons, despite the siege... we still insist on expressing ourselves in the same simple way in which we started".<sup>95</sup> An interesting feature of a great deal of the activities of the NVMs is the juxtaposition of the imagery and symbolism adopted by the various groups to the cult personality imagery and symbolism of the regime. They have purposely, as Charlotte Bank highlights, steered "clear of creating new icons"<sup>96</sup> and leadership figures and instead have adopted images of the children and youth of Syria, symbols of the breaking away from the fear, paralysis and silence that their society was riddled with for so long and instead focus on "ideas based on choice, not force"<sup>97</sup> as Zaher Omareen states.

The NVMs, over the course of the conflict, have had to adapt and reinvent themselves with the evolution of events and they will continue to do so as the conflict continues. One of the findings of Khalaf et.al. in terms of the identity of the NVM groups found that while a number of them could not be seen as "progressive" as such, many still tended to be, "secular, political (in the sense of holding governance structures accountable), socially responsible (calling for an inclusive, pro-poor economic system that provides opportunities for all), pluralistic (demanding democracy, justice, equality and respect for all segments of society), and interested in cooperating to speak out against their oppressors with a strong, unified voice."<sup>98</sup>

Interestingly, given the importance identified in this paper of the understanding of a particular concept or notion, one of the issues that arises from Khalaf et.al.'s research is the "confusion" of some of those within the non-violent groups, surrounding "their understanding of development notions such as democracy, freedom, women's rights, human rights and secularism".<sup>99</sup> Before having the opportunity to really explore their positions on these ideas the extremist groups are exploiting this 'confusion of identity'<sup>100</sup> by selling their own ideas of a solution as a preferable alternative to the hardships many of those on the ground are facing on a daily basis. This is particularly the case when those on the ground have little option in the face of minimal international support. At this point, many are aware of the fact that they are unable to stop the armed and increasingly extremist aspect of the situation, with numerous of their own members having turned to the armed fight. However, for those who remain and for those who continue to join, it is understood that there is an indispensable need to focus on a situation post conflict, which necessitates action today. Unfortunately, with the increase in violence against and threat

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to those within the NVMs by the regime and by the extremist groups, many have been forced to leave Syria. In spite of this they continue their work in their newly established places of residence.

### *Discussing the Emergence of the Political Voice of Syria's Civil Society*

Unlike in the works of Locke, the recent rebellion in Syria differs on a number of points. As we have seen, while the initial uprisings did begin in the hope that they were seeking a more desirable state in the future, they did not begin with demands for the dissolution of the government – that was a subsequent demand in the face of indiscriminate and sustained violent repression by the government. More importantly, the Syrian people did not have a *free* and *just* civil society that was able to effectively aid them in their emancipation from the oppressive regime. Indeed it could be argued that it was the very absence of a *free* civil society with *power* that has resulted in the chaotic situation in which Syria finds itself. Any semblance of a civil society, as has been shown, never had a political voice that had a role within, or relationship with government, which would subsequently have enabled them to have the power to fully achieve what Locke puts forth as the role and duty of civil society at such a juncture.

In addition to this restriction faced by civil society in Syria, one of the shortcomings of the civil society movements in the early 2000s was a lack of real engagement with the conception of civil society itself. The movements were aiming for an almost replication of a civil society according to the traditional understanding of the concept, one in which the institutions of civil society are free to act and fulfil their role in society as a whole. However, the institutions that Gramsci saw as pivotal in the hands of civil society had no semblance of the necessary autonomy in Syrian reality. Religious institutions found themselves tightly wound up with the regime and its appointed officials, professional institutions were limited to Ba'athist organisations as were most of the educational institutions until more recently. Cultural institutions, which the regime advertised as 'humanity's highest need'<sup>101</sup> remained firmly in the hands of the regime which saw the need for, as Miriam Cooke put forth, "absolute control over the production of culture."<sup>102</sup> While the ideal of civil society should indeed be striven for, given the repressive nature of the Syrian state and the obstacles such movements faced, it would seem necessary to contemplate a conceptualisation of the concept that would more closely meet the needs of the situation. By no means is this an undermining of the work, dedication and sacrifices made by those earlier movements, which in many ways laid the groundwork and prepared the way for those who have been participating in the uprising over the last four years.

The uprising has been able to overcome the weakness of the earlier movements of being dislocated from Syrian reality and thus the Syrian populace, as seen with the mobilization of the masses, which Labwani laid down as the foundation for change.<sup>103</sup> Even amongst the total devastation of areas and the chaos that has taken place, people came together to act within a space of civil society that did not exist before, a realm of civil society as a means of expression, development, co-ordination, community but mostly as resistance. In this way, the gradual weakening of the traditionally dominant autocratic Syrian state along with the gradual work undertaken by the earlier civil society movements have, as Sadowski puts forward, provided "new opportunities for civil society to expand, develop and assert its independence".<sup>104</sup> In the hope that at some point in the future it will be in a position to act in ways that a civil society is meant to, in the ideal.

It is now, from within the uprising and more specifically from within the non-violent movements of the uprising that civil society as resistance can be seen to be developing and spreading, both within

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Syria and outside of it – by Syrians forced into exile. It would appear that the transformation of civil society that Gramsci demanded in order for political change to occur, is underway. Syrian civil society is transforming itself from one living under constraints to one that is able to create its own identity – an identity of resistance, against the once hegemonic state and also now against the tyrannical Daesh,<sup>105</sup> extremist groups, and other armed groups fighting for control and power. It has been in the absence of the state and its control that civil society has been able to develop in an extraordinary fashion, despite the suppression they have faced from these armed and/or extremist groups.<sup>106</sup>

A significant proportion of the activities undertaken within the Non-Violent Movements of the Syrian uprising highlight a brewing of a critical and dynamic consciousness in the ‘mentalités’ of the Syrian *now* activist and subsequently in the understanding and development of Syrian civil society. They are now, as Zaher Omareen puts it, “armed with their own instruments, which can contribute to undermining *all* authority that is not based on genuine democracy.”<sup>107</sup> This culture of resistance, opposition and protest is now deeply entrenched and will not easily be lost. Gramsci’s version of civil society as resistance has become a familiar and creative tool within this uprising upon the realisation, as put forward by Halasa et.al. that “creativity is not only a way of surviving the violence, but of challenging it”.<sup>108</sup> Fundamentally, it has been the pursuits of the NVMs that has enabled many Syrian people to, as Daniel Gorman describes, “demonstrate that they are in possession of the very attributes that the regime denies them – agency, identity, diversity, intelligence, beauty and humour... art can be non-violent defiance... it challenges and undermines narratives of power, no matter where they originate.”<sup>109</sup>

Moreover, many of the activities that have been undertaken are done so through the sharing of ideas, dialogue, debate, contestation and in decisions being made within a collective space, described by Mezar Matar, as a “committee of citizens”.<sup>110</sup> In fact, it is only as citizens and through true citizenship that a diverse society such as Syria can be held together and with which it has been undeniably denied. True citizenship then, according to Abbas, can only be built upon the establishment of a “political, legal and cultural framework” which must entail “three essential elements: the right to acquire it; the rights and responsibilities it entails; and participation in public life”.<sup>111</sup> This in hand necessitates fully functioning relationships between “the citizen and other citizens; the citizens and the state; and the citizen and common space”.<sup>112</sup> Essentially these relationships are the underpinning of a social contract between state, society and its citizens.

In Syria’s pre-uprising state, the framework and elements, that Abbas puts forth as a precondition of true citizenship, did not exist. This absence consequently lead to the absence also of a true citizen that was able to act, publicly, within the remit of civil society. As such the relationship between citizen and state was never possible, without consequence at least. And the relationship between citizens and the common space, while existing in certain areas, was deeply limited, particularly if that common space was also a public space. It is within this space, of civil society, that a citizen’s political voice must be heard, but was not. In contrast while the relationship between the potential citizen and the state under the current circumstances in Syria is not possible, the relationship between citizens and that of citizens and the common and public space is one that is beginning to develop. It is within this common (and public) space of which Abbas refers that the political voice of civil society has been growing, with the emergence of the expressions of the social freedoms fundamental for a practicing “active citizen”.<sup>113</sup> They are now capable of providing the vehicle from which a ‘re-knowing’ of Syria can take place. In essence this active citizen has become as such due to the emergence of his political voice. And while

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as it stands his voice is not heard by the *acting* government, the struggle faced is a worthy task in the fight for how things *ought* to be in the future, through the establishment of a social contract between a society, *its* citizens and *its* future state.

### *Conclusion*

These changing relationships between citizen, state and civil society then leads us back to some of the questions raised at the start of this paper regarding the relationship between democracy and civil society. Looking at it as a question over the state inside of which a civil society exists, we can see that this paper has so far argued that the limitations placed upon civil society by a non-democratic state such as Syria has severely undermined the existence of an autonomous civil society with a political voice. This has not been out of a lack of desire or attempt by society but as a result of the suppression of an active political voice. On the other hand if we explore the state of civil society post-uprising, we can take the emergence of an active citizen with a political voice, acting within an emerging civil society, outside of a democratic state, as a suggestion of the potentiality of the existence of an active civil society without the presence of a democratic state. At the same time, this has only been possible under the conditions of the uprising which limited the ability of the state to control it. As such it has been the emergence of the common/public space that has enabled civil society to gain a political voice, *beyond the state*. The hope is that this common and public space that is emerging within Syria (and also for Syrians outside of it) is creating the space from where a democratic polity can be enacted, for as Hinnebusch highlights, “only through such a political incorporation of an autonomous and inclusive civil society can democratization advance.”<sup>114</sup> As such, the aim ultimately would be for this autonomous and inclusive space to become the arena, with its interaction with a future state, from which a social contract could begin to be established, which would ultimately lead the way for the foundations of a democratic state to begin to be built. To surmise then we can say that 1) the relationship between a free citizen and a free civil society are deeply intertwined and interdependent, 2) that civil society has the potential to transform a non-democratic state into a democratic one and as such 3) that democracy is not necessarily a condition for civil society – although it does help civil society more effectively and finally that 4) civil society is a condition for democracy.

### *Looking Forward*

The research undertaken for this paper revealed that while some works acknowledged a change in Syrian civil society and its gaining of a prominent role outside of the government controlled areas nearly all of them were still discussing it within the limited remit of non-government organisations.<sup>115</sup> In light of this, there is a pressing need for a reassessment of the concept if one is interested in a civil society that has the power to have an impact in society and in the state. As such, there needs to be a critical engagement with the concept itself in an attempt to provide a more fluid conception of civil society that demands as its foundation, a political voice.

Similarly, the international community needs to refocus its attention on establishing a broader understanding of Syria's oppositional movements. An understanding that extends beyond the armed and political opposition and beyond that which fits into their own strategic interests. More importantly, is the acknowledgement that the civil society advocates and movements that we have been exploring are seen as a vital element in any comprehensive plan for Syria. Their role would be necessary during the conflict with the aim of resolving the current crisis and also in the future rebuilding of the country.

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Dudouet is firm in her belief that nonviolent resistance should “be seen as an integral part of conflict transformation, offering one possible approach to achieving peace and justice... through its dual process of dialogue and resistance – dialogue with the people on the other side in order to persuade them, and resistance to the structures in order to compel them.”

As for the rebuilding of the country their role is possibly even more vital, for as McGee states “civil society institutions are not simply an indicator of the flourishing of liberal democracy, but rather they are also instrumental in realising the transition towards such a system”.<sup>116</sup> This echoes the sentiment of Zinecker who holds civil society as a potential “democratic actor” with the ability to transform non-democratic situations into democratic ones.<sup>117</sup> In this way, it is amongst these NVMs that an alternative lies to the dominant and often violent players that dominate the narratives of this conflict. Instead those inside and those forced outside of the country need to be supported in order for them to be in a position to play their role in the transformation of Syria from a non-democratic state into a democratic one.



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<sup>1</sup> Al-Achi is an activist, a spokesperson and leading member of the Local Coordination Committees and senior program manager at the NGO Baytna Syria.

<sup>2</sup> Halasa, M. Mystery Shopper: Interview with Assaad Al-Achi. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.110.

<sup>3</sup> Al Haj Saleh, Y. (16<sup>th</sup> November 2014) *Forty Four Months and Forty Four Years/ 1-Two Blindfolds*. Internationale Online.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Kaldor, M.(2003). Keane, J. (1998). Van Rooy. (1998) and others.

<sup>6</sup> Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology*, Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Van Rooy, A. (1998) "Civil Society and the Aid Industry". Earthscan, London. p.30.

<sup>8</sup> Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology*, Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Putnam, R.D. (1993). "Making democracy work". Princeton University Press, Princeton.

<sup>10</sup> This leads us to the inner space of civil society, which we will touch upon further on in the section, however it is important to note here that civil society should not be dealt with as an utopian concept, as an end in itself – but rather should be viewed as a process as well as a goal, knowing it too has its limitations and may never be fully achieved in the ideal.

<sup>11</sup> Rudolpf, S.H. (May 13 2000). "Civil Society and the Realm of Freedom". *Economic and Political Weekly*.

<sup>12</sup> Havel, V. (1993). *Summer Meditations*. Vintage Books, USA.

<sup>13</sup> Keane, J. (1998). "Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions". Stanford University Press. p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Walzer, M. (1991). *The Idea of Civil Society: A Path to Social Reconstruction*. Dissent. 38:293-304. p. 302.

<sup>15</sup> Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology*, Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology*, Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Al Jabiri, M. (1993). *Ishkaliyyat al-dimuqratiyya wa al-mujtama' al-madani fi al-watan al-'arabi*. (The Dilemmas of Democracy and Civil Society in the Arab Nation). Al Mustaqbal Al Arabi. 168:4-15. Cited in Browers, M.L. (2006). *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought: Transcultural Possibilities*. Syracuse University Press, USA. p. 92.

<sup>19</sup> Browers, M.L. (2006). *Democracy and Civil Society in Arab Political Thought: Transcultural Possibilities*. Syracuse University Press, USA. p.5.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed discussion of the conceptualisation of civil society in Arab discourse refer to author's forthcoming publication *Conceptualising Civil Society in Arab Thought*.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, D. (2001). Civil Society in Non-Western Contexts. [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/29052/1/CSWP13\\_web.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/29052/1/CSWP13_web.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Rathzel, N. & Uzzell, D et.al. "The Space of Civil Society and the Practices of Resistance and Subordination". *Journal of Civil Society*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 154-169.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Gettysburg Address, US President Abraham Lincoln, 1863.

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- <sup>26</sup> Gramsci viewed civil society as a battlefield, a space where consensus with the ruling block is created as well as challenged. Quoted in Rathzel, N. & Uzzell, D et.al. "The Space of Civil Society and the Practices of Resistance and Subordination". *Journal of Civil Society*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 154-169.
- <sup>27</sup> Gramsci, A. (2005). "Selections from the Prison Notebooks". Lawrence & Wishart Ltd
- <sup>28</sup> Locke, J. (1689). *Right to Revolution in Second Treatise of Civil Government*. <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch3s2.html>
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Chenoweth, E. & Gallagher Cunningham, K. "Understanding Nonviolent Resistance: An Introduction". *Journal of Peace Research*, 50 (3) 271-76.
- <sup>31</sup> Roberts, A. (2010). *Civil Resistance and Power Politics*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- <sup>32</sup> Dudouet, V. "Nonviolent Resistance in Power Asymmetries". [http://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/dudouet\\_handbookII.pdf](http://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/dudouet_handbookII.pdf)
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Gramsci, A. (2005). "Selections from the Prison Notebooks". Lawrence & Wishart Ltd
- <sup>36</sup> Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology*, Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.
- <sup>37</sup> Sawah, W. (2012). *Syrian Civil Society Scene Prior to the Syrian Revolution*. Knowledge Programme Civil society in West Asia. Hivos: People Unlimited. Netherlands.
- <sup>38</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the nature of Syrian Civil Society pre uprising see Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014). *Activism in Difficult Times: Civil Society Groups in Syria 2011-2014*. Badael Project / Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. And Yassin-Kassab, R & Al-Shami, L. (2016). *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War*. Pluto Press, UK.
- <sup>39</sup> Al Haj Saleh, Y. (16. November. 2014). *Forty-four Months and Forty-four Years/ 1- Two Blindfolds*. <http://www.internationaleonline.org/>
- <sup>40</sup> Yassin-Kassab, R. Literature of the Syrian Uprising. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). *Syria Speaks: Art & Culture from the Frontline*. Saqi Books, UK. p.141.
- <sup>41</sup> George. A. (2003). *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*. p.129.
- <sup>42</sup> Some of the most famous of these salons included Riad Seif's National Dialogue Forum, the Jamal Al Atassi Forum and Al Kawakibi Forum.
- <sup>43</sup> Individuals and groups who may be referred to loosely as Syria's oppositional intelligentsia.
- <sup>44</sup> George, A. (2003). p. 35.
- <sup>45</sup> All of these initiatives were essentially demanding an end to the state of emergency, an amnesty for all political prisoners and a return of those in exile, the establishment of a state of law which would include such things as political and intellectual pluralism, freedom of the press, expression and assembly and the liberation of public life.
- <sup>46</sup> Rabil, R. (October 2003). *Reform in Syria? Prospects and Assessments*. The National Interest.
- <sup>47</sup> Sawah, W. (December 2009). *The Dialectic Relationship between the Political and the Civil in Syrian Civil Society Movement*. Arab Reform Initiative.
- <sup>48</sup> George. A. (2003). *Syria: Neither Bread Nor Freedom*. p. 33-34.
- <sup>49</sup> Kamal Labwani is a doctor and artist and a prominent member of the Syrian opposition movement.
- <sup>50</sup> Joe Pace, interview with Kamal al-Labwani, posted on *Syria Comment* blog by Joshua Landis, Sept. 2, 2005.
- <sup>51</sup> Syria's first lady, Asma Al Assad was one of the main patrons of this organisation.
- <sup>52</sup> Star, S. (3 March 2010). *Syrian Civil Society Empowerment 2010: New Directions for Syrian Society*. Syria Forward Magazine, Issue 37.
- <sup>53</sup> Al-Om, T. (2015). *Syria's Arab Spring: Women and the Struggle to Live in Truth*. Chapter in Routledge Handbook on the Arab Spring. Sadiki, L. (ed). Routledge, UK.
- <sup>54</sup> Landis, J. Quoted in *Syria: A Kingdom of Silence*. (9 February, 2011). Al Jazeera English Online.
- <sup>55</sup> Kaldor, M.(2003). *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War*. Polity Press.
- <sup>56</sup> Al-Aous, Y. (April 2013). *Feminist Websites and Civil Society Experience*. Chapter in Syrian Voices from Pre-Revolution Syria: Civil Society against All Odds. Kawakibi, S. (ed). Knowledge Programme Civil society in West Asia, Hivos, People Unlimited. Netherlands.
- <sup>57</sup> Hinnebusch, A. (1993) *State and Civil Society in Syria*. *Middle East Journal*, Vol 47, No. 2. Pp. 243-257.

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE POLITICAL OF SYRIA'S CIVIL SOCIETY

<sup>58</sup> Although, there are exceptions to this, including the role of Riad Seif who is a prominent oppositional figure, held post within parliament and was also a prominent businessman who inevitably benefited from the opening up of Syria's economic realm.

<sup>59</sup> In fact, a number of those within this business centred civil society have remained supporters of Assad throughout the uprising.

<sup>60</sup> Ghalyun, B. (1992). p. 744-745. Cited in Browsers, M. (2006). p. 111.

<sup>61</sup> Nasser, R. et. al. (2013). Socio-Economic Roots and Causes of the Syrian Uprising. Syrian Centre for Policy Research. And Yassin Al Haj Saleh in a number of interviews available online, including: Syria is a Unique Symbol of Injustice, Apathy and Amnesia. (January 2016). And Yassin-Kassab, R & Al-Shami, L. (2016). Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War. Pluto Press, UK.

<sup>62</sup> Abbas, H. Between the Cultures of Sectarianism and Citizenship. in Halasa, M. (2014) p. 56.

<sup>63</sup> See the following articles for more information on the absence of NVM in discourse: Al-Om, T. (7 June 2014). Don't Ignore Syria's Non-Violent Movements. The Guardian Online. Qayyum, M. (24 March 2014). Syrian Non-Violent Movements Do Exist. Huff Post Politics. Khalek, R. (9 September 2013). Syria's Nonviolent Resistance is Dying to be Heard. Al Jazeera America.

<sup>64</sup> This mapping can be viewed at [http://www.alharak.org/nonviolence\\_map/en/](http://www.alharak.org/nonviolence_map/en/)

<sup>65</sup> Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014). *Activism in Difficult Times: Civil Society Groups in Syria 2011-2014*. Badael Project / Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

<sup>66</sup> Halasa, M. Mystery Shopper: Interview with Assaad Al-Achi. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.104.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014).

<sup>69</sup> Alassad, O. Popular Collision. In Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p 113.

<sup>70</sup> Syrian Creativity: Radio SouriaLi Broadcasts Over the Internet. (7.June.2013). Syria Untold.

<http://www.syriauntold.com/en/2013/06/syrian-creativity-radio-souriali-broadcasts-over-the-internet/>

<sup>71</sup> The publication is still operating online today.

<sup>72</sup> The Grapes of My Country: Syrian Journalism Baptized in Blood. (6. November. 2013). Syria Untold.

<http://www.syriauntold.com/en/2013/11/the-grapes-of-my-country-syrian-journalism-baptized-in-blood/>

<sup>73</sup> Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> The use of satellite phones became popular during these periods of blackout.

<sup>76</sup> There is a vast array of examples of the creative undertakings of those within the NVMs that deserve to be explored, however only a few will be mentioned. My selection is by no means a sign of their importance over others, just ones that have stood out in my mind. The Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution provides an exhaustive selection of examples of the creative expressions of those within the Syrian uprising accessible at: <http://www.creativememory.org/?lang=en>

<sup>77</sup> It was the detainment, torture and murder of the young boys in Dar'aa for their scrawling of slogans taken from the Egyptian and Tunisian demonstrations that lead to protests across the country. As such with the drawing of graffiti and its subsequent consequences being the ember that set alight to the people's uprising graffiti has become a significant element of artistic expression within Syria.

<sup>78</sup> Stencilling Martyrs. In Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.285.

<sup>79</sup> Walls of Saraqeb: The Vitality of Colors in War-weary Syria. (28. February. 2015). Syria Untold.

<http://www.syriauntold.com/en/creative/walls-saraqeb-vitality-colors-war-weary-syria/>

<sup>80</sup> Save the Rest: Campaigning Inside Assad's Stronghold. (5. February. 2015). Syria Untold.

<http://www.syriauntold.com/en/event/save-rest-campaigning-inside-assads-stronghold/>

<sup>81</sup> According to Khalaf et. al. one of the main challenges for establishing these alternative institutions and organisations is a "lack [of] a solid basis on which to build," especially for those within the secular organisations that were rarely allowed to function under the regime. As mentioned previously, religious charitable organisations were often given some level of approval to undertake their activities and as such have established relationships with which they can continue to work. Those attempting to establish the secular organisations on the other hand are having to build these institutions from the very foundations.

<sup>83</sup> Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014).

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<sup>84</sup> Although this is becoming increasingly difficult with the spread and domination of extremist groups, particularly ISIS.

<sup>85</sup> Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014).

<sup>86</sup> Nonviolence in Syria. (October 2013). Peace News. <http://peacenews.info/node/7373/nonviolence-syria>

<sup>87</sup> The global growth in practical activism (or at least an interest in it) is also evident with the large increase in translations of Gene Sharp's book *From Dictatorship to Democracy* from six languages prior to 2003 to twenty two by 2008 and over 30 by 2012.

<sup>88</sup> Halasa, M. Mystery Shopper: Interview with Assaad Al-Achi. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.106.

<sup>89</sup> Syria's Legal Fight amid the Gunfire. (3. March. 2013). Garden Court.

<https://gclaw.wordpress.com/2013/03/04/syrias-legal-fight-amid-the-gunfire/>

<sup>90</sup> Syria's Legal Fight amid the Gunfire. (3. March. 2013). Garden Court.

<https://gclaw.wordpress.com/2013/03/04/syrias-legal-fight-amid-the-gunfire/>

<sup>91</sup> Since their emergence 84 volunteers have lost their lives in the process, according to their website.

<sup>92</sup> White Helmets, Syrian Civil Defence. Twitter Page. <https://twitter.com/syriacivildef>

<sup>93</sup> White Helmets Website. <https://www.whitehelmets.org/>

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Banners in the Colour of the Euphrates. Kartoneh. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.62.

<sup>96</sup> The Art of Persuasion. In Halasa, M. et. al. (2014) p.75.

<sup>97</sup> Omareen, Z. The Symbol and Counter-Symbol in Syria. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.101.

<sup>98</sup> Khalaf, R. et. al. (2014).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Cooke, M. (2007). *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official*. Duke University Press. p. 35.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p.9.

<sup>103</sup> Joe Pace, interview with Kamal al-Labwani, posted on *Syria Comment* blog by Joshua Landis, Sept. 2, 2005.

<sup>104</sup> Sadowski, Y. (1997). *The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate*. p. 7. In *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*. Eds. Beinin, J. & Stork, J. I.B Tauris, London, UK.

<sup>105</sup> The Arabic acronym and derogatory term used to refer to ISIS.

<sup>106</sup> For a detailed discussion of the struggles faced by civil society organisation such as the Local Councils see the work undertaken by Khalaf, R. in *Governance without Government in Syria: Civil Society and State Building During Conflict*. Syria Studies, Vol 7, No.3.(2015).

<sup>107</sup> Omareen, Z. The Symbol and Counter-Symbol in Syria. Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.101.

<sup>108</sup> Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.vii

<sup>109</sup> Gorman, D. From the Outside Looking In. in Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.232.

<sup>110</sup> Matar, M. Cartoons by Kafranbel. Halasa, M. et. al. (2014). p.102.

<sup>111</sup> Abbas, H. Between the Cultures of Sectarianism and Citizenship. in Halasa, M. et.al. (2014). p.54-55.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p.55.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

<sup>114</sup> Hinnebusch, R. *State and Civil Society in Syria*. *Middle East Journal*. Vol. 47, No. 2 (Spring, 1993), pp. 243-257

<sup>115</sup> Again, as I have mentioned before, while such organisations are not the problem in and of themselves, the focus on them as the sole representation of civil society is greatly problematic and damaging. As such, while such organisations have indeed been increasing in number this is not to be taken as the only symptom of an expanding and developing civil society.

<sup>116</sup> McGee, T. (June 2012). *Syria: Promoting Civil Society in the Face of Civil War*. Civil Society, Human Rights, Syria.

<sup>117</sup> Zinecker, H. "Civil Society in Developing Countries – Conceptual Considerations". *Journal of Conflictology*, Vol 2, Issue 1, 2011.